

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 QUITO 001265

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [EFIS](#) [ETRD](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SENV](#) [EC](#)

SUBJECT: NEW MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT ACKNOWLEDGES
ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

REF: A. QUITO 983

[1](#)B. 04 QUITO 2704

[1](#)1. Summary. In a courtesy call with the new Minister of the Environment, Anita Alban Mora, Embassy and USAID officials presented Galapagos and illegal logging as the Mission's two top environmental priorities. Alban agreed that these issues were serious and said she planned to deal with them, welcoming cooperation with us and the donor community. She accepted a USAID invitation for a briefing on their programs, planned to meet with the donor community as soon as feasible, and commented that she would go to the Galapagos soon to begin working issues there. She also noted that she would try to implement the independent and transparent process for selecting directors of the Galapagos National Park (GNP) that the donor community and we have pushed for months. We congratulated her on her choice of interim GNP Director, Washington Tapia, a figure well and favorably known to us. End Summary.

Young and Nervous

[1](#)2. At 37, Anita Alban is by far the youngest of Palacio's cabinet. Her reputation preceded her into this position (RefTel A), indicating that she is likely neither qualified nor capable of handling ministerial-level responsibilities. She is also thought to owe this position to Lourdes Luque, a former Minister of the Environment, Palacio-family associate, and Guayaquil political figure. She was very nervous at the beginning of the meeting but relaxed towards the end, realizing that we had not come to lambaste her but to offer support.

[1](#)3. Alban came alone to the meeting. We first laid out our top concerns - Galapagos and illegal logging. We then congratulated her on her choice of Washington Tapia as interim director of the GNP. First, she said, Galapagos is also a priority for her. She commented that she would seek to implement the transparent and independent process for selecting GNP Directors, as formulated by USAID/UNDP/IDB funded consultants (RefTel B). This would go a long way towards depoliticizing the park, our short-term Galapagos goal. She also explained that income-generating alternatives for fishermen were a medium-term goal. She has contacted FOMIN about establishing some sort of credit system to help move fishermen into tourism and other sustainable activities.

[1](#)4. Illegal logging was also of concern to her. We commented that Ecuador is only second to Brazil in its rate of deforestation. She understood and nodded when we suggested that independent third party monitoring is probably the answer. We discussed the SGS case, a Swiss company who had the contract with GOE to do independent monitoring of illegal logging. SGS was so effective that logging interests managed to have their contract nullified by the courts in 2003. There has been no effective monitoring of illegal logging since. Alban, to our surprise and in contrast to the position taken by other GOE officials, commented that the SGS contract was still valid. She said she was meeting with SGS later that day.

Meet the Family

[1](#)5. We encouraged her to become involved with the donor community in order to work on issues. USAID offered to brief her on their programs and she accepted the invitation. She also said she hoped to engage the international community as soon as possible in order to establish environmental priorities.

Conservation Wins the Trifecta in Galapagos

[1](#)6. There are three appointed positions in the Galapagos of exceptional prominence and importance to conservation efforts - the Director of GNP, the Head of INGALA (Instituto Nacional de Galapagos), and the Governor of Galapagos province.

[1](#)7. Washington Tapia was named interim director of GNP by Alban. Wacho, as he is known, is a very technically qualified director who is well and favorably known to us. He participated in our IV program and we have very good relations with him.

18. Carlos Carrion, brother of former GNP Interim Director Victor Carrion, is also a good choice for Head of INGALA. While some have found him eager to please everyone with whom he meets, he is environmentally oriented and will likely support conservation efforts in the Galapagos.

19. Finally, Grace Unda was selected to be Governor of Galapagos province. She was previously a virtually unknown figure in the Galapagos, working as the Provincial Coordinator for Vive la Democracia. We recognized her commitment to democracy and honesty early on and nominated her to participate in our IV program before she became governor. This should establish a good working relationship with her now that she is governor.

Comment

10. While not yet seasoned, Alban seems to be making the right choices. Our fear is that her benefactor and political interlocutors will start demanding anti-conservation decisions from her. Our hope is to bring her into our fold far enough to educate her and help her resist such difficult political demands.

Kenney